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JYEKUNDO AREA

I. Terrain and Vegetation

The city of Jyekundo, or Yü-shu, is an important transportation and administrative center of southeastern Tsinghai, located at a point where the low hills and rolling grass plains of Amdo (Tsinghai) merge into the rugged mountains and incised valleys of eastern Tibet. The country surrounding Jyekundo represents in general two basic types of terrain: the low hills and level plains of the grass country, principally located to the northwest and east; and rough, dissected hill and mountain country that extends north to south, in a broad and widening swath, in the center of which flows the Yangtze River.

The Yangtze valley in the vicinity of Jyekundo trends northwest-southeast with mountainous terrain extending 20 to 30 miles east and west from the river. The Yangtze hills rise sharply some 3,000 to 4,000 above the 11,000 to 12,000 foot level of the river with the highest ridges and crests at 16,000 to 17,000 feet. Although the mountains paralleling the Yangtze are not particularly high (there are no permanent snow peaks near Jyekundo*), the mountain barrier is sufficiently broad and has so few major east-west tributary valleys that known trails and passes leading to the east and west are relatively few. To the east there is a sharp and notable terrain break with the crumpled hills bordering the Yangtze giving way to the open plains and rolling country of the upper Yalung; to the west and south, however, the mountains bordering

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the Yangtze merge into the broken hills and occasional small plains that characterize the upper Hekong basin.

In the vicinity of Jyekundo, the Yangtze flows in a narrow valley, in places through narrow limestone gorges in an alternating pattern of shallow rapids and still pools of great depths. The valley is most restricted from a point about due east of Jyekundo and thence for a distance of 20 or more miles to the south with the river in this area twisting in great loops through a canyon. To the north and south, however, here and there valley flats and terraced slopes are cultivated, providing grain and vegetables for the inhabitants of occasional small villages and monasteries that cling to the valley sides. Some of the tributary valleys, notably east and northeast of Jyekundo, are of sufficient size to have bits of land suitable for cultivation and consequently support an occasional village.

East of the mountainous terrain that borders the Yangtze lies the extensive grassland country known as Tsachakhe, through which flows the Yalung River and its tributaries. This is a region of flat, shallow, U-shaped valleys and open, often hummocky plains divided here and there by hills and occasional low, pyramid-shaped mountains. Elevations of the valleys and plains range between 12,000 and 14,000 feet. Aside from a few monasteries, most of the inhabitants are nomads who roam the plains with their flocks and tents. East of Jyekundo, however, there are indications that land reclamation is being carried out (probably by labor reform personnel) and some tracts of grassland now are being cultivated.

North and west of Jyekundo is a second extensive grasslands area characterized by plains, low hills and swells, and occasional low mountains

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and rocky outcrops. The most prominent landscape features in this barren area are several lakes, the largest of which is the Chonan Nor located some 30 miles west of Jyekundo. Just to the south of these grasslands is an elongated, northwest-southeast aligned old lake plain, the southern terminus of which is located slightly over 20 miles southeast of Jyekundo. The Jyekundo airfield is located in the southern part of this plain.

Travel on the grasslands near Jyekundo is comparatively easy throughout the year, handicapped to a minor extent in summer by wet, boggy conditions and swollen streams. In the mountains, however, travel would be much more difficult and in many places restricted to established trails. Late summer travel also would be more difficult because of the higher water levels. During winter, travel on the grasslands should not be hindered by snow, except occasionally during and immediately after infrequent storms. Mountain travel during winter occasionally will be hampered at the higher elevations, and some of the passes (generally at 14,000 to 15,000 foot elevations) may be blocked for short periods during winter. Throughout the area winter cold and strong winds will make travel more difficult and time-consuming with the intensity of cold and wind increasing with elevation. Except during summer, the Yalung probably can be forded in most places; the Yangtze, however, is not fordable. During the period from late November through late March, ice bridges form in quite stretches on both major streams and can be used to cross the rivers.

The plains east and northwest of Jyekundo are covered with low thorny bushes and sagebrush scattered among the grass, but the enclosing hills have only bunch grass broken by jutting rocks. Many low-lying areas become bogs and swamps during the rainy season. The grass is adequate to support large herds

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of wild game, although forage is limited in the spring before new growth appears.

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In the gullies and ravines of the mountains rimming the Yangtze Valley south of Jyekundo, there begins to appear occasional clumps of coniferous trees -- fir, cedar, spruce, and juniper. Vegetation appears to be lower and of the more hardy drought-resistant varieties such as juniper and scrub cedar on south or "sunny" slopes, while the shady, cooler north-facing slopes tend to produce thicker, taller stands of spruce and fir. It is roughly 50 miles or so from Jyekundo, however, before any significant patches of forest are found. It is possible that some of this northern fringe of forest has been cut by the Chinese for use in construction work in the Jyekundo area and in other treeless areas to the north.

II. Climate

The climate of the Jyekundo area is similar to that of the Chando area to the south, except that winter temperatures are a little colder and summer rainfall is somewhat less. Detailed climatic statistics are available for Yl-shu, although the records are for only 2 to 3 years and therefore should be regarded as indicative of conditions rather than as firm climatic data.

Temperatures below freezing are common from October through April, though frost can be expected at any time except for a few weeks during mid-summer. By December, normal nighttime lows are near zero and can at times drop to -20°F. This bitter cold is intensified, particularly on the higher grasslands

and near pass summits, by strong, generally westerly winds. Daytime readings during winter normally reach 35° to 40°F. Summer temperatures can be expected to rise to the 60's and 70's.

As in other parts of Tibet, summer is the rainy season with 2 to 4 inches of rain the probable monthly norms for the period May through September. Although some sort of precipitation is recorded far more than half the days during summer, totals are relatively light and the yearly figure is only about 17 inches. Rainfall is mainly of the afternoon shower type with hail a sometimes annoying accompaniment; occasionally, days of drizzle and light rain occur. Records of the frequency of snowfalls and snow accumulation are not available. Brief winter snow is believed to be common at the higher elevations in the mountains and on the higher grasslands. Accumulations, however, are light (probably 3 inches or less from any given storm), and generally evaporate quickly. Only on the highest ridges does snow permanently accumulate.

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Amount of Precipitation (Inches)

<u>J</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>Total</u>
.22	.31	.10	.19	2.60	3.40	4.24	2.59	3.26	.40	.13	.19	17.39

Period of record -- 2 years

Average Number of Days With Over 0.1 Millimeter of Precipitation

<u>J</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>D</u>
4	5	4	7	17	22	27	13	21	8	3	4

Period of record -- 2 years

Number of Clear Days*

<u>J</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>D</u>
4	3	4	1	0	0	0	3	2	1	5	6

Period of record -- 2 years

Number of Cloudy Days**

<u>J</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>D</u>
9	9	14	13	14	19	26	13	14	11	4	7

Period of record -- 2 years

* The number of fine days indicates the number of days within a certain period of time during which the average daily cloud amount is 0.0-2.9.

** The number of cloudy days is the number of days within a certain period of time during which the average daily cloud amount is greater than 3.0.

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